

July 6, 2006

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NEW ORLEANS - U. S. Rep. Charlie Melancon (LA-03) made the following comments after today's Science Committee field briefing on levee rebuilding at NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans:

"I arranged today's field briefing for the purpose of learning what progress has been made, almost a year after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, in rebuilding our levee system and preparing for future hurricanes. Today's briefing re-emphasized the fact that comprehensive hurricane protection requires not just better levees, but a commitment to restoring our coastal wetlands and barrier islands that provide a natural buffer from storms.

"I had hoped that today we would be able to discuss a report from the Army Corps of Engineers listing specific projects needed to secure Louisiana's fragile coastline from future hurricanes. Unfortunately, the Administration has sliced these details from the most recent draft, leaving only vague rhetoric on how they would decide which projects were most needed in the future. We don't need any more bureaucratic foot-shuffling. We need to hear the Corps' expert recommendations on where we go from here to prepare for the next big storm. For that reason, I have sent the Corps a letter asking for a copy of the original report, unedited by the Administration and with the specific projects included, and today I repeated that request.

"Be that as it may, today's discussion was very informative and enlightening, and I would like to thank everyone for attending, especially my colleagues Rep. Bill Jefferson and Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee, Lafitte Mayor Tim Kerner, Grand Isle Mayor David Carmardelle, Morgan City Mayor Tim Matte, and Lafourche Parish President Charlotte Randolph, who is also the incoming President of P.A.C.E. (Parishes Against Coastal Erosion). Their presence at this briefing reflects the critical importance of the levee systems in South Louisiana, not just for protecting hundreds of thousands of lives and millions of dollars in property, but also as an essential line of protection for the oil and gas infrastructure that provides this nation with over a quarter of its energy needs.

"I would also like to thank our panelists for providing valuable expertise and information: Col. Richard Wagenaar of the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, Dr. Gordon Boutwell of the American

Society of Civil Engineers, Dr. Ivor van Heerden of the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center, Ms. Sidney Coffee from the Louisiana Governor's Office, Mr. Randy Hanchey from the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources, and Mr. Windell Curole, General Manager of the South Lafourche Levee District.

"Finally I would like to thank the folks at Michoud for providing the site for today's briefing. You may recall, Michoud managed to stay a dry island in the middle of an ocean of flooding during and after Hurricane Katrina, thanks to the miraculous work of the team who stayed behind. Their courage and sacrifice allowed Michoud to resume building external tanks for the space shuttle Discovery just five weeks after Katrina made landfall. Thank you.

"Protecting Louisiana's coast requires cooperation between many agencies and organizations and countless dedicated individuals. Each brings a unique perspective to this challenge and I hope today's briefing is a preview of future teamwork and collaboration to protect our coast."

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